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Gender Education and the Transformation of Calvinism in the Netherlands, 1870–1970

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ABSTRACT *Examining from a gender perspective religious education within a prominent branch of Dutch Protestantism, this article investigates the interplay between oppressive and emancipating educational forces. The so-called Neo-Calvinists—progressively minded, yet orthodox—sought successfully to update traditional Calvinism and keep it abreast with modern developments from circa 1870 onwards, notably by reforming school, family and youth culture. Notwithstanding Calvinism being traditionally sexist biased, the role of women and girls was becoming more important. Firstly, the article sketches both the influence of Calvinism in the history of the Netherlands and Dutch 'pillarized' culture and society between 1880 and 1970, Neo-Calvinism being one of the main 'pillars' within this religiously compartmentalized society. Secondly, it focuses on Neo-Calvinist gender education and its paradoxical effects.*

Introduction: a programme of paradoxes

In the autumn of 1918 a group of young orthodox Calvinist women set up a national educational organization of their own, following the example (1888) of the young men of their faith: the Federation of Dutch Neo-Calvinist Girls' Clubs. One and a half years later the federation began to publish a magazine, called *Bouwen en Bewaren* [Building and Preserving]. From 1920 until 1957 it served as the focus for the weekly gatherings of thousands of local girls' clubs in the Netherlands, where the information from the magazine was being studied and discussed. The paradox inherent in the magazine's name lay at the very root of the federation's manifesto: it was felt strongly that women had the right (and the duty) to help build up a modern society and a modern culture, which would at the same time help to preserve the inherited values of orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands for the future. Without giving up their gender-specific and explicit confessional identity, women should realize that they, like men, had the duty with God's help to make the world a more Christian place. Women had to learn how to exert their influence in a way that was concordant with the times, as well as to help ensure that God's will was done both in private and in public life. They could and should no longer be

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chained to the home as uneducated slaves of husband and children, but should be able to develop their intellect under professional, reliable guidance, and build up their character to their own spiritual benefit and that of their neighbours.

The underlying idea of this Neo-Calvinist girls' federation was that the twentieth century made quite different demands on young women compared with the preceding ones. To continue to preserve the true faith while living in modern times, girls and young women should be enabled to form well-based opinions both on their own Calvinist cultural heritage and on competing ideologies such as liberalism, feminism, socialism and all the other social trends that were operative at that time. Women's suffrage and emancipation, the increase in the amount of information available, the extension and differentiation of the school system, the growth of modern science, the secularization of thought, industrialization, poverty, alcoholism, prostitution, new threats to chastity, married and family life, the changing position of youth, etc.: all these phenomena were seen as compelling reasons for educating girls in a different way which—while laying more weight than in the past on independence and self-confidence, intellectual development and strengthening of the individuality—would still aim at fostering feminine, Calvinist character. A plea, in other words, for self-development and self-determination within religious limits.

One of the main characteristics of this girls' federation was its rationalist, cognitivistic tendency. Unlike other youth movements of the time, the Neo-Calvinist youth movement was designed merely as a means of intellectual and moral education. There was no place in it for sport, recreation, love of nature, outings, uniforms, public religious services, plays and the like. It helped members to absorb and process knowledge, to take part in intensive discussions of theological, historical, political, social and cultural principles, and helped form their moral character to fit them to become loyal members of the Neo-Calvinist movement. Surprisingly enough, the young women's clubs had the same cognitive, society-oriented educational ideals as the young men's. Suggestions from certain Neo-Calvinist educationalists that girls should concentrate more on the specific skills required by good mothers and Christian wives met with little or no response. These girls' clubs must thus be regarded as a contribution of Neo-Calvinism to women's emancipation in the early twentieth century.

In the present article on the historical role of religion in gender-specific education we will investigate how, and why, girls' education in Dutch Neo-Calvinism became modernized, what the main objections to and problems in this process were, what role the young women themselves played here, and what the consequences were for the awareness and position of women in the Neo-Calvinist subculture. We will start by discussing the role of Calvinism in the history of the Netherlands, and the remarkable socio-cultural structure of the country between 1880 and 1970 which has come to be known under the name of '*verzuiling*' ('pillarization' or 'voluntary apartheid' (cf. Halstead, 1995)), i.e. the tendency to organize most social institutions (schools, hospitals, insurance companies, youth movements, broadcasting associations, choral societies, travel clubs, professional organizations, etc.) along confessional and ideological lines. We will also touch on the development and characteristics of Neo-Calvinism as one of the principal 'pillars' within this pillarized

society. Finally, we will consider Neo-Calvinist education and child-rearing in family, school and youth organizations, with special reference to the position of women and the specific characteristics of girls' education.

Calvinism and Pillarization in the Netherlands

Calvinism has left an indelible mark on Dutch culture. From the late sixteenth century, Calvinists occupied the main positions in the religious, cultural, social, political and economic life of the country (Schama, 1987; Dekker & Groenendijk, 1991). The Calvinist Church was the established church, from the war of independence (1568–1648) against the Catholic Habsburgs until well into the nineteenth century. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, Holland was gradually changing into a modern secular society, in which Calvinism lost influence and traditional religious beliefs seemed to have become a relic of the past regarded by the liberal and Latitudinarian leaders of opinion as out-dated and even as dangerously reactionary. In response to this, some progressively minded orthodox Calvinists united towards the end of the century under the leadership of the theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) to modernize themselves and to organize their frustrated followers throughout the country into a powerful political pressure group, an example soon followed by Catholics, socialists and others. In the course of time, these movements crystallized out into fairly isolated and self-satisfied but flourishing and influential subcultures. The Netherlands developed into a society in which careful social controls ensured a stable equilibrium between these different ideological groups.

This process, which has come to be known as pillarization, a thorough compartmentalization of society, characterized the entire cultural and socio-political development of the Netherlands (Lijphart, 1968; Stuurman, 1983). By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had left its mark on nearly all aspects of life. New churches (e.g. the Neo-Calvinist 'Reformed Churches') broke away from the old ones. The newly founded confessional schools soon overshadowed and outnumbered the non-denominational schools. As general democratic suffrage for the whole population developed, political parties on various confessional and ideological bases grew up. Pillarization also manifested itself in the growing differentiation within the fields of philanthropy and social services, in the developing trade unions and above all in the growth of confessional sciences and subcultures.

As a result of all these developments the Netherlands had, more than any other European country, a special, largely ideologically determined, social, cultural, political and economic structure for just about 100 years. From 1880 to about 1970, the Netherlands was largely divided up along ideological lines. Most inhabitants of the country saw themselves primarily as belonging to one of these 'pillars', within which they passed most of their lives (often including their working lives). The presence of an intermediate 'layer' of private ideologically based organizations, via which public money for educational as well as social and cultural purposes was distributed to society, became a salient feature of the Dutch welfare state as well (De Kwaasteniet, 1990).

During a large part of the twentieth century this extraordinary form of compartmentalized social cohesion appeared to numerous Dutchmen to be more prominent and stronger in many respects than, for instance, socio-economic or regional forms of solidarity, or even kinship. Neo-Calvinism, Catholicism and socialism were doubtlessly the most strongly structured pillars, but we may also speak of communist, liberal, general Protestant and Jewish pillars (cf. Wintle, 1987). While the central role of these pillars in all branches of life was strongly supported by the state, political life in the Netherlands was itself also heavily pillarized.

Schools and education in general have played a particularly important role in this pillarization. The present-day Dutch educational system, with twice as many private confessional primary schools as non-religious (or 'neutral' as the legal term runs) state ones and even a few large ideologically-explicit universities, all financed fully and on an equal footing as the state ones by the state, has its roots in this pillarization. Right from the start, the confessional schools, colleges and universities have been instrumental in bonding the population ideologically with their respective pillars (the socialists formed an exception to this rule, preferring the public state schools to setting up private 'red' schools). Pedagogical sciences, educational services and training of teachers, educationists and welfare workers, which had been professionalized and put on a more scientific basis about the turn of the century, not only stimulated pillarization of the school system but also of child-rearing within families. Within this context, confessional educationalists absorbed the new results of child psychology (based on Darwin's theory of evolution and the theory of heredity), pedology (a now obsolete term for child studies), teaching psychology; experimental educational studies, psychoanalysis, individual psychology, etc. and put them to use in the different ideological frames of mind. Political parties (notably in the 'red' pillar) and pillarized trade unions also laid considerable weight on the importance of different kinds of educational activities in public life, while the churches were equally interested in the socialization of youth. Especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the modern pillarized youth movements were recruited for this task (Selten, 1996). In the Netherlands the century of childhood was being built on pillars.

Neo-Calvinism may be regarded as the prototype of a 'pillar'. Its influence on Dutch society far outweighed its numerical size (less than 10% of the Dutch population). For example, seven of the 13 Dutch cabinets in power between 1901 and 1939 were headed by a Neo-Calvinist prime minister. The Neo-Calvinist movement under the inspiring leadership of Abraham Kuyper managed to combine religious and moral conservatism with social, political, technological and cultural modernity (Kuyper, 1899). Its traditional character was reflected in its explicit adherence to the Reformed creed and to Calvinist orthodoxy, in its preservation of traditional forms, usages and rituals and in its rediscovery of Calvinism's glorious past, in particular the 'Golden Age' of the seventeenth-century United Provinces (cf. Schama, 1987). Its modern aspect lay in its appreciation and acceptance (although not always without reservation) of a whole range of fundamental cultural and social changes that had happened since the end of the nineteenth century, such as the increasing importance of the sciences in all aspects of life, the expansion of scale and

increasing uniformity of public life, the new media, advances in education, improvement of the material and cultural position of the population, democratization, secularization, the predominant influence of liberalism and the rise of new ideologies such as positivism, socialism and feminism.

The Education of Mothers and Daughters in the Family Circle

Churches have a long tradition of trying to reform family life and parent–child relations. Ever since the start of the Reformation, Calvinist church leaders have done their best to keep a check on family life and monitor the private lives of their congregants. Many preachers and elders have put much effort into their attempts to teach fathers and mothers how to give their children a Christian upbringing. From about 1880, Dutch Neo-Calvinists revitalized these efforts to influence educational processes. House visits were made, and countless sermons, pamphlets and books were written, to teach the faithful the difference between right and wrong, and how to bring up their children.

However, the methods used in this age-old task of educating the educators showed a marked swing from patriarchalism to a more modern, liberal course. The main focus came on the intellectual preparation of (young) women for the tasks they would have to perform as good wives and mothers. The theologians regarded the more practical aspects of motherhood and housekeeping as self-evident, to be learnt by daughters from their mothers, or by maids from their mistresses. Instead, they laid particular stress on knowledge of Christian ethics, child psychology, educational theory and understanding of religious, cultural, social and political issues. By so doing, these Neo-Calvinist leaders of opinion made an important contribution to the intellectual development, emancipation and growing self-awareness of women, a fact which so far has not been duly appreciated by historians.

In general, however, men and women were regarded as equals, even though clear differences were perceived between the sexes in such important matters as mental make-up and social destiny. The essence of the matter was generally formulated by saying that men and women were equal before God. A contemporary Christian marriage should therefore be founded on love and mutual respect, not on domination and subjection. Neo-Calvinist experts on teaching and the family tended to go half way towards rejecting traditional Calvinist or Christian views on connubial ethics. For example, the renowned theologian and educationalist Professor Herman Bavinck (1918) accused Petrus Wittewrongel, a seventeenth-century predecessor, and other early leaders of the Reformation of error in assigning the wife an inferior position in the marriage:

> The Reformers and their pupils were not in the slightest ... inclined to despise women; they all taught in accordance with the Scriptures, in particular Genesis 1: 27, that woman, like man, was created human and in God's image.
>
> Nevertheless, they were far from denying the inequality of the sexes. In fact, the old Scholastic idea of the inferiority of women, which could be based on such texts as Genesis 2: 18 and 3: 16, I Corinthians 11: 7

> *et seq.*, Ephesians 5: 23–24 and I Timothy 2: 13–14, still lived on to a certain extent. While woman was man's equal in a religious and ethical sense and even surpassed him in such virtues as piety and patience, she was still man's inferior as regards dignity, power and grandeur. Luther said, 'The female is much weaker, more seductive and inconstant in body and mind than the male', and all other teachers expressed similar opinions. ... Wittewrongel does not hesitate to call woman the lesser, man her superior, her head, master and lord. ... In [traditional Protestant, JS & LG] ethics, great stress has been laid on the helpfulness, submissiveness, gentleness, reverence, etc. which the wife should display towards her husband. (pp. 41–43)

An important tool used by the Neo-Calvinists in their attempts to modernize and feminize Protestant family life was the magazine *Moeder* [Mother], which appeared from 1934 to 1961. The editor during all these years was the university-based educationalist Jan Waterink, a highly respected figure in Dutch Protestant circles (Sturm, 1991). As in his many other popular publications on educational matters, Waterink used this well-produced periodical to persuade Protestant parents that what matters in education is not the stern classical themes of traditional Calvinism such as the sinfulness, incorrigibility and stubbornness of children and the need for authority, obedience, sense of duty, discipline, breaking of the will and punishment, but primarily love and a real understanding of the essence of the educational process and scientific child psychology. He kept on returning to such topics as the need for freedom and trust in parent–child relationships, the uniqueness of each child, and the possibilities and limitations inherent in each developmental phase through which a given child passes. Writing in a direct, engaging style, Waterink explained to Protestant women that many educational problems can be ascribed to the errors, sins and defects of the parents, their desire to be in the right, their obstinacy, foolish inflexibility, impatience, greed, laziness, boastfulness and (false) ambition. It is hardly surprising that this Neo-Calvinist 'educator of the mothers' was regarded as excessively liberal, not to say lax, by many dogmatic Calvinists, but was revered by his readers, as the circulation of the magazine and the many reactions and letters from readers testify (Sturm, 1991, pp. 67–82).

The basis for a good upbringing of girls is an intensive relationship hinging on mutual trust between mother and daughter, the Neo-Calvinists claimed, staying within the tradition of Christianity in general. This was the best way to prepare a girl from her cradle for the special tasks she would have to perform as a woman. In this unconstrained way she would then learn the requisite skills, be introduced to the daily life of a mother and housewife, acquire the necessary feminine character traits and virtues, and become accustomed to assuming responsibility in practice. However, Neo-Calvinist psychologists were of the opinion that girls in general displayed less initiative than boys, so they needed more resolute encouragement and stimulation.

Thus, those responsible for Neo-Calvinist popular education were not only convinced that woman's place was in the home, but, as the general Christian idea

says, that the family was the natural place for bringing up girls as well. After all, women were treated with due respect in their own family, while in public life they risked abuse, discrimination and disgrace at every step. Besides, girls needed much more love, care and education than boys, and above all protection, because they were much more vulnerable than boys from a moral point of view. However, these progressive Protestants regarded the dangers of the modern world as so great that they felt obliged to follow recent fashions of giving girls a somewhat wider education, even to the extent of talking openly and explicitly about sexuality and informing girls about the facts of life. Neo-Calvinists also considered the family, and feminine influence, essential for proper formation of male character. For example, affectionate relationships with the women of the house represented an important lesson in practical ethics. 'A man who has really loved his mother', said Bavinck (1930, p. 151), 'could never sully a woman's honour'.

After the Second World War the pervasive and revolutionary changes in nuclear-family life and parent–child relations have affected Neo-Calvinist families intensely, more so than in rather traditionally oriented Calvinist or Christian circles. Undoubtedly, this relatively big impact of postmodern family ideals among Neo-Calvinists has been due mainly to the relatively open and osmotic nature of their educational ideas and their emphasis on cognizance of competing subcultures and ideologies, notably feminism and the emancipation of the youth.

The School Education of Girls

Education outside the confines of the family has always been a point of great concern to the protectors of morals in the Christian churches as well. From the end of the war of independence against the Catholic Habsburgs, the Netherlands had been a predominantly Calvinist society. One of the consequences was that most public schools (in the American sense) were founded and run by the local Dutch Calvinist congregations. Of course, there were some (illegal) schools for Catholics and Non-conformists, but they were not looked on with favour by the local and regional authorities, and always ran the risk of public exposure by Calvinist fanatics.

The French invasion of 1795 brought separation of Church and state, and completely changed the situation in the field of public education. The state no longer insisted on public schools on a Calvinist basis. Nevertheless, since the Kingdom of the Netherlands after the Orange Restoration still regarded itself as a Christian (i.e. Protestant) nation, all schools had to be Christian. On the other hand, the government wished these schools to be real public schools in the sense that Catholic, Mennonite, Jewish or Latitudinarian pupils would not feel hurt or insulted by anything the teachers said or did. Calvinist catechisms and other books, the New Testament (in reverence of the Jews) and confessional dogmas were banned from the new liberal-Christian schools (Kruithof, 1990, pp. 96–130). The growing self-confidence of the orthodox Calvinists led, from about 1835, to the '*Schoolstrijd*' ('School War') which was to split the Netherlands into two for the next 80 years. Peace came with the new education Act of 1920, the result of the struggle being a school system based on the freedom to found private schools serving any religious

or cultural group, while all schools were to be fully funded by the national and municipal authorities (De Kwaasteniet, 1990). The Neo-Calvinists played a leading role in the 'School War'; indeed, this was one of the strongest themes creating and guaranteeing the unity of the Neo-Calvinist pillar.

Once the Neo-Calvinists started to get more and more of their own separate, state-subsidized (100% after 1920) schools from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, they were of course faced with the task of developing their own specific theory of education. With hindsight it may be said that, despite all statements to the contrary at the time, this teaching philosophy differed very little from that of the non-denominational schools as regards school organization, teaching objectives, syllabus and teaching methods. The main difference in practice was the special spiritual atmosphere aimed at in the Neo-Calvinist schools. Apart from the central place accorded to Biblical history in the curriculum (naturally dealt with along Neo-Calvinist exegetical lines) and the penchant for including anti-papist facts and dates in the teaching of Dutch history, the main feature of this atmosphere was the wide use of religious rituals and symbols to embellish school life. There were frequent prayers and thanksgivings, the Christian holidays were celebrated, all pupils had to learn a weekly verse from the Psalms by heart, the harmonium was given pride of place at the front of the classroom, there was a plentiful supply of improving books and pictures written or painted in the appropriate style, and the schools had close, albeit non-formal links with the local church.

As regards the gender-specific aspects of Neo-Calvinist teaching theories for schools, we want to stress that (just as in the Neo-Calvinist youth organizations) great weight was laid on the intellectual development of both sexes, something which was not self-evident in the Christian tradition (Sturm, 1988). This explains why the Neo-Calvinists were not particularly interested in separate boys' and girls' schools. It is true that some reservations were expressed from time to time about co-education for adolescents, mainly in connection with the moral risks associated with contacts between the sexes in this age range. In general, however, the view was held that boys and girls should go on receiving instruction together right through secondary school, college or university.

The only exception to this rule was in the case of most vocational schools. It was taken for granted that men and women should be prepared for different tasks in life, in view of the perceived differences in aptitude and calling between the sexes. As far as a woman was concerned, the natural situation would be that she would marry and have children. In this ideal case, grown women did not need to practise a profession; their tasks lay in the home. Of course, the reality was often different. An appreciable number of women never married and would have to earn their own living in later life. Hence, girls had to be prepared for this eventuality in schools. The preference was for these single women to practise a profession in line with what was regarded as their feminine nature, especially in the fields of nursing and other forms of welfare, housework and teaching. Neo-Calvinists were thus convinced advocates of separate types of certain vocational schools for girls. Such schools were supposed to teach what were regarded as typical female skills such as cooking, sewing and other useful handwork, care of women in childbed and children, nursing, etc. Training

courses for female teachers of these various subjects were often held in association with such schools. Training as a kindergarten teacher was also considered to be exclusively suitable for girls. On the other hand, the training colleges for elementary school teachers were usually co-educational.

In general, gender equality was the aspiration of the Neo-Calvinists. Of course, in private primary schools girls usually had domestic science classes (where they learned sewing, cooking, etc.), while boys were learning more masculine skills like woodwork, as was the case in schools of any denomination, as well as in the state schools of the time. A distinction was also commonly made between boys and girls when it came to physical education, in all types of schools. Christian ethics had in the past always looked askance at gymnastics and sports in general as a pagan activity, basing this view on a statement of St Paul that exercise of the body is of little use. If, however, the law demanded it, or if enlightened Neo-Calvinist educationalists put physical education on the curriculum for reasons of hygiene or on the basis of medical considerations, then at least this physical education had to be separate for boys and girls, to inculcate a proper sense of modesty and decorum.

Under the influence of the rapid secularization, the emancipation of women and young people, the influences of the modern mass media and the massive 'depillarization' of Dutch society since the 1960s, all educational institutes of the Neo-Calvinist conviction have been losing most of their denominational identity and profile. Although all private denominational schools are still being fully paid for by the Dutch state, most of these schools, having given up their ideological explicitness, are having a hard time defining what differentiates them from the state school next door. In the meantime, more traditional and fundamentalist kinds of Calvinist schools are feeling more self-assured and have been growing in numbers and size since the 1970s. New pillars have arisen (recently also an Islamic one), including pillarized schools next to the old ones, e.g. the Neo-Calvinist and the Roman Catholic ones, which are crumbling away in a deliberately pluralist culture that the old pillars seem to value and support more and more.

Neo-Calvinist Boys' Clubs

The oldest youth organizations in the Netherlands originated in a Protestant environment. Orthodox Protestant young men's clubs on a national scale were founded from the middle of the nineteenth century; they were devoted to preaching the Gospel, to welfare and educational work and the further development of especially the urban youth. Internationally they worked together under the umbrella of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) (Shedd, 1955). In 1888, however, a group of determined young men left this Dutch YMCA branch to set up the first recognizable Neo-Calvinist youth organization at a national level in the Netherlands: the Federation of Neo-Calvinist Boys' Clubs (Sturm, 1988). This federation had the sole aim of educating older adolescents and young men in Neo-Calvinist ideology and more generally in history, values, standards, politics, social and Reformed ecclesiastical views and ideals. The local boys' clubs held weekly meetings at which the main objective was not to get together and have fun,

but to concentrate seriously on learning basic theoretical principles and character-building. Each local club was an independent body in which boys and unmarried young men from the age of 16 were in principle self-governing. They elected a committee from their own members. The local Reformed Church often wanted to have a say in what went on in the club too, although formally there was no link between the club (being an organization of the youth themselves) and the congregation. The main way adults could exert influence on this youth movement was via the national federation, which was responsible for the periodicals, training material, choice of themes to be dealt with and for the regional and supraregional calendar of meetings.

The Neo-Calvinist boys' clubs were thus almost exclusively study circles. Their aims specifically excluded charity work and evangelization among children from a non-church environment (activities which were undertaken by the Dutch branch of the YMCA), but were directed at the further development of their own members. The federation was thus a typically intellectually oriented youth organization with a primarily cognitive aim (knowledge of the Neo-Calvinist ideology), and with a well-defined personal development target: each member was supposed to perfect himself intellectually, to learn how to speak in public, defend his own pillar against outside attacks and in general prepare himself to be a reliable, convinced, discerning, critical, independent-minded, decisive, well-trained member of the Neo-Calvinist pillar in later life. Many former members did indeed later become church elders, board members of private Protestant schools, or leading members of denominational trade unions, political parties or other pillarized organizations. Later still most of them would look critically at their own subculture as well.

Neo-Calvinist Girls' Clubs

Thirty years after the setting up of the Federation of Neo-Calvinist Boys' Clubs, in 1918, a comparable organization was formed by and for girls and young women: the Federation of Neo-Calvinist Girls' Clubs mentioned at the start of this article. Readers will hardly be surprised to hear that many Calvinists were highly critical of this appearance of women on the public stage. Some joked that they had no need of these 'beardless theologians', and no confidence in the intellectual capacities of women. Nevertheless, one of the typical characteristics of the Neo-Calvinist movement was precisely the fact that the modern conviction gradually gained ground that women could and should also be brought into contact with the outside world, with schools, modern media, non-Christian opinions, feminism and socialism. The need to arm women against (rather than to protect them from) all these developments from their youth was a central idea in Neo-Calvinism in contrast to more conservative branches of Calvinism. The Neo-Calvinist girls' federation was founded on the initiative of the young women themselves. This was evidence of the need for self-development and greater understanding of the world among growing Neo-Calvinist girls. As such, the girls' federation may be seen as part of the great wave of feminism that manifested itself at the turn of the century.

It might be thought surprising at first sight that it took the young women 30 years

longer than the young men to set up their federation. However, this was the common pattern in the history of all modern youth organizations of any conviction. On the one hand, young men had more freedom and more social scope to set up such organizations on their own; and on the other hand, when adults did set up such organizations on behalf of young people, their main consideration was the protection against the perils of the outside world these organizations offered. Paradoxically, girls were generally thought to require less public protection than boys, since even in non-Christian circles they still ventured much less outside the circle of their home. On second thoughts, it is much more surprising that a federation of Neo-Calvinist girls' clubs did originate at all. Was it not highly unusual for young women from an orthodox Protestant environment to think of taking such an initiative? How was it possible at all in Calvinist circles, where so much weight has always been laid on the traditional division of roles between the sexes? Surely, theoretical study, the public domain, politics and power were regarded as matters reserved for men only. Shouldn't women be content to concentrate on practical matters such as motherhood, home and family, and on feminine virtues such as docility? All Neo-Calvinists, men and women alike, would agree that in the ideal case they should. But in practice, it was becoming more and more difficult to maintain this strict division of roles. More than in the past, even the women did need a better understanding of a whole series of social, cultural, moral and political issues, and did need to develop a stable and strong character. The modern girls' clubs could satisfy this urgency for social and moral development. Another relevant fact was that, more often than the boys, girls would stop their schooling at the end of elementary school after completing compulsory education (which lasted first for six and then for seven years in the Netherlands in the first four decades of the twentieth century). The girls' clubs thus really filled a gap in the educational system.

Protestant young women's clubs had in fact existed in the Netherlands long before 1918. However, their activities had consisted mainly of making clothes for church and missionary welfare work. Such groups got together under the leadership of, for instance, the minister's wife to knit and sew for the needy. They often organized a Christmas party at which poor people received presents of clothes and had the Gospel preached to them. To prevent too much gossiping during the knitting, one of the older ladies from among the group leadership would read aloud from the Bible or other 'improving' works. It was also common to sing hymns during this philanthropic handiwork. The propaganda of the Neo-Calvinist girls' federation forced this type of young women's group into the background. The federation did its best to turn the existing Calvinist sewing circles into Neo-Calvinist study circles for older adolescent girls and young women.

As with the young men's federation, the young women's federation laid the main stress on personal development, mastery of general principles and acquisition of knowledge. The foremost place in the themes planned to be covered at meetings was occupied by Biblical and Church history, religious doctrine, history of the Netherlands and a number of social themes such as politics, social systems and relationships, economics, etc. In fact, as regards organization, mode of operation and choice of the themes dealt with, the girls' clubs were to a very large extent copies of the

boys' clubs sketched above. However, the choice of subject matter did sometimes take perceived typical female interests and aptitudes into account. The clearest example of this is the particular importance attached to questions relating to the family and education. This is reflected in the official objectives of the girls' federation, which was to prepare girls for their future tasks in 'family, church, society and state', whereas the boys were to be prepared for their tasks in 'church, state and society'; we may note that 'family' is omitted in the case of the boys, and that the 'state' (i.e. politics) comes before 'society' for them.

Despite the emphasis on the family in the case of the girls, they didn't want things to become too practically oriented. However, this attitude was often criticized. For example, in 1929 a prominent Neo-Calvinist expert in the field of girls' education, schools inspector Wirtz, uttered the following criticism of the abstract nature of the training in the girls' clubs (Wirtz, 1929):

> What do I miss? Practical consideration of such problems as, How can I furnish the living-room pleasantly, even tastefully, at the lowest possible cost? How can the housewife best organize her daily chores so as to leave time for her mental development? Details of the latest developments in household techniques. Are we trying to create Montessori mothers? ... A marvellous new cooking stove has been developed somewhere; the newspapers are full of it, and the makers are keen to demonstrate it. ... Why not ask for a demonstration, to see what miracles can be wrought on this stove, with the latest cooking pot and Delft salad oil? (pp. 165–166)

However, Wirtz's suggestions were vehemently rejected (Knoppers, 1932, p. 112) and left no trace in the programme of the Neo-Calvinist girls' federation. It is true that Miss Meiny Parmentier, the president of the federation, did try to mollify such criticisms in 1938 (*Gedenkboek 1918–1948* [Memorial Book], 1948):

> No, we didn't throw our knitting needles and crochet hook disdainfully in the corner. You were proud of crocheting a smart jumper or knitting a nice-looking pullover for your fiance; but next to the knitting basket lay the latest issue of the federation magazine, *Bouwen en Bewaren* [Building and Preserving]. (p. 71)

The separation of the sexes prevailing in the Neo-Calvinist youth organizations seems to have been accepted as a matter of course. When it was mentioned at all in the documentary sources, the main justification given for the separate activities of the boys' and girls' clubs was the need to study with like-minded people in a harmonious atmosphere without disturbance from feelings of love, jealousy, modesty and shyness which all too often arose when adolescents of different sexes were present together. Apart from the annual regional and national conferences, only rare cases of joint meetings of boys' and girls' clubs are known; when they did occur locally, this was mainly because the individual clubs had too few members.

In the Netherlands, as well as elsewhere in the Western world, youth organizations have rapidly disappeared after the Second World War (Selten, 1996). The ongoing scholarization of the society, the information revolutions and the consumerist

culture have been among the main causes of this process. Moreover, in the case of the Neo-Calvinist boys' and girls' clubs, the historical sources show that the very aim of these organizations, i.e. the study of history, culture and society, has led critically minded and well-informed young Neo-Calvinists to attack the older generations and traditions in a rather intemperate way. In particular, the 1960s and 1970s reverberated of such generational conflicts within Neo-Calvinism, even to the point that within a few years, not only the youth organizations, but the whole pillar seems to have vanished almost altogether.

Conclusion

The rather modern and emancipated view of Neo-Calvinist gender education and in particular the unique cognitivistic character of the Neo-Calvinist youth movement helped young people to integrate successfully into the Neo-Calvinist pillar before the Second World War by training them to be reliable, convinced Neo-Calvinist. However, by training its members to be so discerning, critical, independent-minded and decisive, it also made a significant contribution to the subsequent secularization and the break-up of the Neo-Calvinist pillar from the 1950s onwards, a process which happened much faster, and in stormier and a more principled way than in the cases of the other pillars (Sturm, 1993). In particular, the federation of the girls' clubs has helped girls and young women in the long term to stand up for themselves in the traditionally sexist-oriented Calvinist culture. Like other fruits of the Neo-Calvinist enterprise, the girls' federation actually carried the seeds of its own destruction in itself from the start (Sturm, 1993). It encouraged young women to work, to think, to take decisions, to will, to feel and to believe for themselves (Wirtz, 1929, p. 101). The risk that many of the women enlightened by this type of training would eventually turn away from the isolated and pillarized forms of Calvinism in the changing social and cultural climate of the pluralist second half of the twentieth century was not foreseen by its founders; they were too immersed in an optimistic belief in the continued powers of expansion of the Neo-Calvinist faith and the ongoing strengthening of the pillar through their multifarious and well-organized educational activities.

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